DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 351 442 CE 062 057

AUTHOR Bertrand, Olivier
TITLE The Recognition of Occupational Skills and Educational Qualifications within the EEC.
INSTITUTION Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications, Paris (France).
REPORT NO ISSN-1156-2366
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
JOURNAL CIT Training & Employment: French Dimensions; n8 Sum 1992

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Educational Attainment; Employer Attitudes; Employment Opportunities; Foreign Countries; *International Cooperation; International Relations; *Job Skills; *Occupational Information; *Occupational Mobility; Relocation; Unions
IDENTIFIERS *Europe; *European Economic Community; France; Germany; Italy; Spain; United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

A survey conducted in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom analyzed employment practices and viewpoints of the social partners regarding comparability of qualifications and geographical mobility. Carried out in late 1991 with a limited sampling of respondents (firms, employers' organizations, and unions), the survey focused specifically on three sectors: banking, electronics, and tourism/hotels. The consensus was that the level of mobility was low and could not be expected to increase. Where it existed, worker mobility involved those at the extremes of the skills ladder. Instances were difficult to find in small and medium-sized enterprises. The hotel and catering trade was the only sector where mobility was widespread and not limited to managerial personnel. The main obstacles to international mobility were cultural. These firm practices were identified: the majority of foreign managers were employed on loan from another company in the group and an academic degree was a significant criterion only for the recruitment of beginners. Firms and employers' organizations were aware of the problem of recognizing qualifications. The following conclusions were drawn: voluntary mobility should be facilitated; respondents had reservations about evaluation and comparison of qualifications; evaluation of acquired skills needed to be studied; and respondents saw a need for various kinds of information and exchanges rather than for tools aimed at harmonization and formal comparability. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED351442

TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT

FRENCH DIMENSIONS

A NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

No 8

Summer 1992

The Recognition of Occupational Skills and Educational Qualifications within the EEC

A survey among employers and workers' organizations suggests that the building of Europe creates needs for various kinds of information and exchanges rather than for tools aimed at harmonisation and formal comparability.

CONTENTS

THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS WITHIN THE EEC

- Overview of Worker Mobility in EEC Countries
- Firm Practices and Problems Encountered
- Conclusions and Recommendations

CEREQ BRIEFING

- CEREQ in Marseilles
- Recent CEREQ Publications
- Recent Articles Published in Formation Emploi

A series of studies have been undertaken by different EEC bodies (notably CEDEFOP) in order to compare qualifications in member countries. These studies are based on the principle of free circulation of workers and (implicitly at least) on the hypothesis of their increasing geographical mobility. This situation presumes that the knowledge and recognition of qualifications needed for the development of different mechanisms or tools of information, comparison or equivalence are available from one country to another.

In order to verify these hypotheses and specify the goals and needs involved, it seemed useful to begin with a concrete analysis of firm practices and the viewpoints expressed by the social partners. To this end, CEREQ undertook on behalf of the EEC Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth a rapid survey in five countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom).[1] This survey, carried out over a short period of time (late 1991) and with a limited sampling of respondents (firms, employers' organisations and unions), makes no pretenses of statistical representativeness. It focuses specifically on three sectors: banking, electronics and tourism/hotels. The main conclusions are presented below.

[1] The institutions in charge of conducting the respective surveys were the Institût für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (Nuremberg), the Institut de Ciencies de l'Educatió (Barcelona), CEREQ, the Istituto di Ricerche Sociali (Milan) and the National Institute for Economic and Social Research (London).

CE062057

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CEREQ

A FRENCH RESEARCH CENTRE FOR ANALYSIS OF OCCUPATIONS AND OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

O Bertrand

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

OVERVIEW OF WORKER MOBILITY IN EEC COUNTRIES

EXCEPT FOR certain categories of workers, there was a consensus that the level of mobility is low and cannot be expected to increase.

▮ Low Worker Mobility

In general, the survey stressed the scarcity of statistical information, on both the EEC level and that of individual countries and firms. Very few of the firms were able to supply quantitative data. But the unanimous view was that worker mobility within the EEC generally remains at a modest level, and one that is lower than initially anticipated. Differences do emerge however.

▮ Concentration at the Extremes

It was generally agreed that worker mobility, where it exists, primarily involves those at the extremes of the skills ladder:

- **Least Qualified Workers**. This is the case for most frontier workers, who seek employment elsewhere for lack of other possibilities, for better pay, or for seasonal work. While frontier work continues, however, manufacturing activities are generally relying less and less on foreign workers for their unskilled labour.
- **Most Qualified Workers** (essentially engineers and senior managers). This is the situation most often observed in the firms. Such mobility may be slightly on the rise, but the number of workers involved remains very limited.

▮ Firm Size, Sectors and Countries

In the five countries under consideration, it was very difficult to find instances of worker mobility in the SMEs. When this did occur, it was basically an irregular and marginal phenomenon. The observations that follow therefore mainly concern large firms that are often already international in scope.

The hotel and catering trade is the only sector studied where mobility is widespread and not limited to managerial personnel (reception, cuisine). In specific terms, such mobility appears to be the weakest and to elicit the least interest in Spain and Italy. The United Kingdom supplies the greatest number of mobile managers to other countries (recruitments from Ireland towards Italy were also reported).

▮ Obstacles to Worker Mobility Mainly Cultural

Within the limited field of investigation, it appeared that the main obstacles to international mobility were cultural. When most European workers enjoy little mobility within their own countries, how can they be expected to willingly take on the additional problems posed by a change of culture and especially of language (which is generally the main obstacle, although the learning of a new language may also be a source of motivation for young people)?

The British, as has been noted, are perhaps less reticent. There are also cases (in the hotel and catering trade and among young senior managers) where an international experience is considered an advantage, notably for language study. But in this case, for non-managers, the time frame is limited, and may be considered that of a training period.

Factors such as the lack of harmonisation of social protection, housing, relocation of spouses and education of children must also be taken into account. Lack of information on living conditions and employment opportunities can also be discouraging, especially for the least educated workers. In Italy, remuneration was identified as the major problem; elsewhere, this seems to play a role mainly for frontier workers and those with the least skills.

▮ Further Decreases in Mobility?

Most respondents saw few reasons to anticipate an increase in worker mobility, apart from senior managers in large multinational firms or in certain cases where specific qualifications and skills are lacking. Even here, it may well be asked whether the growth limit will not soon be reached, in terms of firm policies as well as labour supply, which is in fact restricted to a well-defined population. It could be argued that the more positive attitude observed among young people corresponds to a real cultural change, but even if there appears to be new motivation for moving abroad, it might not continue with adulthood.

A preliminary discussion of these conclusions stressed the necessity of distinguishing between voluntary and forced mobility. The latter (probably the greatest in volume) corresponds to economic difficulties, is often out of control (South-North migrations) and is hardly something to be perpetuated.

This much said, the future evolution of worker mobility in Europe is still an open question, as many factors are involved.

FIRM PRACTICES AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

▮ Conditions of Employment

In large multinational manufacturing and banking firms, the majority of the foreign managers are employed on secondment from another company in the group. In such cases, problems of recruitment and recognition of qualifications do not arise.

A particular change in the policies of these firms was noted in France: while the French home office has traditionally sent directors on secondment to its subsidiaries abroad, with expatriate status, there is now a tendency for these managerial posts to be filled with local personnel (which would diminish mobility). At the same time, a desire for cultural exchange can motivate young managers to seek an international experience as a step in their careers. In this case, however, assignments abroad would no longer constitute an exceptional situation requiring indemnities. This is already the case for managers in the large hotel chains. Certain firms define a double status that guarantees continuous social protection.

▮ Recruitment and the Role of Degrees

In general, it was observed that the degree is only a significant criteria for the recruitment of beginners, especially in large, internationally oriented manufacturing and banking firms seeking to europeanise their managerial personnel. Their options are either to respond to unsolicited applications, to recruit foreigners as trainees, or to prospect among the universities.

Some large multinational firms have an individual or a department in charge of international recruitment, contacts with foreign universities and information on degrees and equivalents. There were a few cases (notably

in Germany) where firms felt that this information was difficult to obtain and therefore undertook their own documentation and research. Employers' organisations indicate that they receive few requests for information from their members.

In tourism and hotels, and when recruitment involves experienced personnel rather than recent graduates, the role of the degree is very limited relative to that of work experience.

▮ *Evaluating Skills and Qualifications*

Various elements are involved here--educational qualifications, skills, competences, work experience--and it is not always easy to separate them for purposes of recognition. In large firms with foreign subsidiaries, information can generally be obtained about the value of a degree obtained abroad. A few firms indicate problems with this, but they manage nonetheless to determine grading and pay scales. The French survey yielded one instance of an engineer whose qualifications were not recognised abroad, but it is not known whether this was an exception.

Mention was also made of the situation of frontier workers in Germany, whose remuneration is much higher without any significant relationship to qualification.

The different reports stress that apart from beginners, employers are above all interested in the evaluation of work experience and personal qualities.

It should be noted that the awareness of firms and employers' organisations about the problem of recognising qualification also varies according to country. It seems much greater in Germany and much weaker in Spain and Italy, mainly because recognition does not seem to be a problem in the latter two countries (and the rare cases of mobility are easily resolved by the large multinationals). As for the unions, in Italy, they are more interested in extra-Community mobility, which involves a larger population.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE differing awareness among countries affects the conclusions drawn by the various participants in this analysis. In particular, it should be noted that in Germany there was more receptiveness to a European approach to these problems, whether in terms of information, comparisons or equivalents. By contrast, there was reticence in Italy (see below).

Other divergences were observed (notably in France and the United Kingdom) among partners and types of interviewees. The firms, intent on maintaining their room for manoeuvre, sometimes distrust EEC regulatory initiatives and place their trust above all in the law of the market. Employers' organisations have a broader and longer-term vision which sometimes makes them more receptive to the usefulness of a Community approach. Certain union organisations welcome the possibility of protection against the consequences of an unfair internationalisation of the labour market. It must be kept in mind that the survey could not reach individual workers and thus could not directly evaluate the problems they might encounter. It may be hypothesised, however, that if such problems existed, they would be signalled by the union organisations.

A certain number of those interviewed (notably in the United Kingdom) are also conscious of the distance between what is desired and what is actually possible in the area of Community tools.

Finally, it should be noted that the future of worker mobility is tied to the question of recognition of worker qualifications: if the latter raises few problems and little interest, notably in the medium-sized firms, this is due to the fact that mobility is currently very low. The situation would undoubtedly change if there were an increase in the future.

Once again, it must be stressed that the conclusions vary greatly according to the level of qualifications. If mobility is lowest at the intermediate level (end of secondary or post-secondary) this is also where the problems of comparability are the most difficult.

▮ *Facilitating Voluntary Mobility*

It goes without saying that the general problems cited, notably by the harmonisation of social systems, must be resolved. Apart from this, the most common conclusion bears on the significant role of student and trainee mobility, which largely defines that of workers. The EEC programmes aimed at facilitating exchanges are acknowledged, but considered too cumbersome to implement and of limited impact. There is a desire for the development of internationally oriented training institutions or international circuits for advanced training, which could come about notably on the basis of agreements among the establishments themselves.

Nonetheless, mobility should not be a goal in itself.

▮ *Reservations about Evaluation and Comparison of Qualifications*

Only one French union organisation alluded to degree equivalents, recalling the need for a sectoral directive on engineers. But there was a certain consensus in France calling for an independent body on the European level that would be capable of accrediting the different engineering degrees without any pretensions of ranking them.

Few of those interviewed expressed interest in the **analysis and comparison of occupations and job contents.** If several sought better knowledge of the meaning of a certain title in another country, they were also generally conscious of the difficulties of developping and consulting a comprehensive document. The report on Spain stresses that it would be necessary to begin with an analysis of that country's employment and qualifications system, which is neither formalised nor codified.

CEDEFOP's studies on **comparability of qualifications** are often little known or subject to reserves. In Germany, the approach is considered too restrictive, and in the United Kingdom, too rigid; in France, employers did not find it useful, although it was enthusiastically supported by one union representative and a training organisation.

In Italy, there was fear that a comparison of qualifications might prove unfavorable to Italian workers insofar as the level of public training programmes was considered lower. In the United Kingdom, some respondents felt that a harmonisation of qualifications was desirable in theory, but given the difficulties already encountered on the national level, they remained sceptical about the possibility of concretising it. Others fear that it will reflect the lowest common denominator.

By contrast, all those who have participated in studies on comparability stressed the interest in exchanges of information and the fact that the awareness of other systems was stimulating. It was repeatedly observed that these comparisons could increase consciousness of the importance of qualifications and training and thus encourage national initiatives, especially in the least advanced countries.

▮ *Reflections on the Evaluation of Acquired Skills*

In Germany, several firms are favourable to the idea of a directory of occupations, but a majority of those interviewed are opposed to that of a "passport", which is considered too bureaucratic and oversimplified. Opinions are divided on records of **work experience**. In France there is a sharp reaction against anything resembling the unfortunate experience of worker record books. But as in the United Kingdom, there is a more positive response to the possibility of establishing a portfolio of competences and validating acquired skills.

The **portfolio of competences** might be an interesting idea to pursue, provided that it does not involve standardisation and its supervision is left to the workers involved. The **validation of skills** acquired from both continuing training and work experience might also be examined in greater depth, on the basis of studies already completed or underway in the different countries (the United Kingdom and France among others).

It is less apparent how a Community approach might be applied to the **evaluation of jobs**, which is often carried out with the methods of an international consulting firm. Nor is it clear how the **evaluation of competences** could be subject to a common approach, although this is a major preoccupation among today's firms. It could nonetheless stimulate exchanges of views and methodological observations, given that this is an area where subjectivity and cultural particularities play an essential role.

▮ *Priority of Information on Training*

If there is one need to be met, it is first of all a need for information, especially on the education and training systems existing in the different countries. It would be difficult to develop comprehensive, up-to-date documentation on such a vast subject. But the efforts could be limited to those areas where problems arise: higher education, especially for engineers (because their mobility is greater) and intermediate post-secondary training (because this is where the confusion is greatest and the information most inadequate). It was also suggested that providing factual information is less important than making the logic of the different information systems comprehensible.

▮ *Other Areas of Information*

While the priority lies with the training systems, information on other subjects was also requested:

- A number of firms were interested in comparative data on the concrete functioning of the labour market (conditions of employment and recruitment, remuneration and labour costs);
- Workers seeking employment might be more mobile if they had more accessible information on employment possibilities in other countries, as well as on living conditions and housing;
- Finally, the Italian report mentioned the idea of data banks on workers open to mobility.

▮ *Targetting Publics and Diversifying Means of Information*

The main conclusion that emerges from this study is that the majority of potential users hardly believe in the usefulness, or even the possibility, of implementing tools that are cumbersome, standardised, universal and institutionally defined on the EEC level.

By contrast, there is a demand for information, dialogue and exchange that could be satisfied if the responses were appropriate to the particular needs of different publics. It is necessary to distinguish the needs of organisations from those of individual firms and workers, and likewise, to distinguish what requires written documentation from what can be provided through data banks, personal exchanges and dialogue.

Firms need easily available documentation on training systems. The question of whether they could use data banks or computerised systems elicits varied responses, because it is not obvious that access would be easy for a large number of users. This solution would perhaps be more appropriate for a limited network of organisations.

This is even more true for workers, who, in most instances, cannot have direct access to documentation in any form and therefore should be able to turn to regional and local sources of information. These could also receive the comparative studies that are still necessary, especially in areas that cannot easily be reduced to operational tools (e.g., occupations and the organisation of work, the employment-training relationship). Such studies cannot pretend to cover all sectors and all countries equally.

In general, a distinction could be made between issues lending themselves to a national approach (e.g., training systems, institutional aspects) and those requiring a sectoral approach (concrete functioning of the labour market). The sectoral approach could permit the initial development of the kinds of concrete exchanges that the firms and the social partners of the different countries have been requesting for a better knowledge and comprehension of their respective systems.

These exchanges would be co-ordinated in turn with those arising from the European social dialogue. The latter would respond in particular to the demands of union organisations, which are less interested in documentation per se than in the ultimate contribution of such information and comparison to a certain degree of labour-market regulation.

It is also necessary to reiterate the usefulness of comparisons and exchanges of views in stimulating greater consciousness of the role of qualifications and training, as well as in provided models from one country to another. If the Europe of tomorrow is to be one of competences, then these must not necessarily be subordinated to the development of worker mobility.

Olivier Bertrand

(Translation by Miriam Rosen)

A further discussion of these issues will appear in the paper prepared for the OECD meeting on certification and transferability to be held in Porto in October 1992

Reproduction autorisée à la condition expresse de mentionner la source. Dépot légal 3ème trimestre 1992.
Administration CEREQ - 9, rue Sextius Michel, 75015 PARIS - FRANCE - tel : (33) 1 45 75 62 63
Direction de la publication : Yves Lichtenberger - Secrétariat de rédaction : Béatrice Belbenoit

ISSN 1156-2366